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The Star in the East: A Biblical Drama in Four Acts: by Anna Jane Harnwell

NO PLAYS EXCHANGED

Samuel French: Publisher
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SAMUEL FRENCH, Publisher, 28-30 West 38th Street

The Star in the East

A BIBLICAL DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

BY

ANNA JANE HARNWELL

PRIZE PLAY
DRAMA LEAGUE OF AMERICA

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New York

SAMUEL FRENCH

Publisher

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Strand

CHARACTERS

AHASUERUS, King of Persia and the East
HEGAI
SHAASHIGAZ }
HARBONAH }
BIGTHAN }
TERESII } Chamberlains
HAMAN, an Amalekite, the king's favorite
MORDECAI, a Jew, the cousin of Hadassah
A SCRIBE
VASHTI, the Queen
HADASSAH, a Jewess (afterwards, Esther)
ANNA, her handmaid (afterwards, Nicaso)
A SLAVE
SOLDIERS, ARCHERS, MALE AND FEMALE
SLAVES AND HANDMAIDENS

The play is laid in Shusan, the capital city of Persia, in the latter part of the fifth century B.C.

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The Star in the East

ACT I

SCENE. *A simple room in the house of MORDECAI, the Jew, near the palace of KING AHASUERUS.*

At upper left a heavy striped curtain closes the opening into the street. Near this door are the racks for the large water bottles. Two or three are in these racks. On a shelf are a few earthen utensils, bowls and cups, as well as a basin of copper. In the back center is an open window, through which one may see the gardens of the palace and a portion of the palace itself.

ANNA sits before a loom weaving some purple cloth. A large roll of the completed weave lies beside her on the floor. She sits on a low stool. Nearer the center HADASSAH reclines on a pile of cushions. She is about eighteen years old, and beautiful in the dark oriental fashion. Both she and ANNA are dressed in the flowing simple Jewish costume of the time. HADASSAH is reading aloud from a scroll as the curtain rises.

HADASSAH :

*"They that hated them ruled over them,
Their enemies also oppressed them,
And they were brought into subjection under their hand.*

Many times did he deliver them;
But they were rebellious in their counsel,
And were brought low in their iniquity,
Nevertheless he regarded their distress,
When he heard their cry;
And he remembered for them his covenant,
And repented according to the multitude of his
mercies.
He made them also to be pitied
Of all those that carried them captives.

Save us, O Lord our God,
And gather us from among the nations,
To give thanks unto thy holy name,
And to triumph in thy praise."

(Pauses a moment in thought.)

David foresaw our sorrow when he wrote this hymn of the captivity. I wonder shall we ever live to sing the song of our deliverance?

ANNA. I like not this hymn. It is over long. I like the short ones best.

HADASSAH. Naughty Anna! Thou sayest that but to tease. How lovely is the color in that cloth!

ANNA:
Well may thou say so. I got the dye
From an old Tyrian merchant. 'Tis a rare
And secret root, and very costly. (*Holds up some
of the cloth.*)
'Twould be beautiful embroidered all in
Lilies or in leaves, vine leaves and tendrils—
Nay, sweet Hadassah, frown not, you know it
would.
HADASSAH:
I know these Persian customs tempt our race
From the mosaic law. "No likeness," doth it read,

"Of anything in heaven or in earth
 Or even in the waters underneath,
 Shall be devised by Israel, saith the Lord."

(Regards it contemplatively.)

But if we trim it with a fringe of gold
 It would be worthy even of a queen.

ANNA:

And thou hast royal blood within thy veins,
 Even Saul's blood, who was a mighty king.

HADASSAH:

Little avails what flows within the veins
 Of a poor Jewish maid. The child of exiles,
 Daughter of a race despised and persecuted.

ANNA:

Sweet Hadassah, look not so sad. Read
 From the marriage hymn I always love.
 'Twill make thee smile, and I will work again.

HADASSAH:

Thou art my sunshine, Anna. Thou scatterest
 Sorrow as the sun the clouds. Here is the place—

(Reads)—

"Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline
 thine ear;

Forget also thine own people and thy father's house ;
 So shall the king desire thy beauty :

For he is thy Lord ; and worship thou him.

And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift ;
 Even the rich among the people shall entreat thy
 favour.

The king's daughter within the palace is all glorious ;
 Her clothing is inwrought with gold.

She shall be led unto the king in broidered work.

* * * * *

I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations:
Therefore shall the peoples give thee thanks for ever and ever."

(*A pause, while HADASSAH sits lost in thought.*)

ANNA:

Why so sad, mistress? This great king is not
Unkind. He is a gentle master.
Our people do not suffer as they did
Beneath his father's rule.

HADASSAH:

I know, and yet Mordecai saith he's led most easily,
The power of Haman waxeth day by day.
He hates our people. He will strike at them
If once his favor with the king is sure.
I fear the man.

ANNA:

There's the queen, Vashti;
Rumor everywhere says the king hearkens
To her lightest word.

HADASSAH:

'Tis true. The king
Is captive to her beauty. And why not?
Her skin is alabaster where each vein
Is marked with sapphire. All her hair
Is crinkly gold, which streams below a waist
Like to a willow wand. But beryls are
Her eyes; while her proud heart was cut from
marble,
So hard and cold it is. Mordecai saith
He fears her more than Haman, and Haman
Is but her creature.

ANNA:

Always there's the king.
He hath a kindly smile. I cannot think
That he would do us harm.

HADASSAH:

I hope as thou.
He hath a kindly smile and wondrous eyes,
Yet Hegai tells my father when he's roused
And fired by heat of passion, he becomes
As firmest steel, thrice hardened in the fire
Of his own wrath. Alas! our people live
In daily peril.

ANNA:

If only this poor
Remnant might be saved!

HADASSAH:

It must be saved
Until Messiah comes; The Prince of Peace
Isaiah once foretold. Surely the Lord
Hath not forgot his children, who languish
Here in exile and in tears! We must have
Faith, though hope be nearly fled.

(Enter MORDECAI. *He is a handsome, commanding figure, about sixty years of age, dressed in dark flowing robes with a turban on his head. He wears a full grey beard.*)

MORDECAI. Peace be to thee, and unto all this house!

HADASSAH and ANNA. (*Rising*) And unto thee,
O master, peace and grace.

HADASSAH. (*Embracing him*)
O Mordecai, my father, thou art welcome.
Come rest upon these cushions. Tell thy daughter
What is the news with thee?

MORDECAI:

I am most weary.

The air hath been so sultry, and the heat
Oppressed me sorely. It is good at last
To rest within the house. (*Turning to ANNA.*)

Anna, I think the maids
Do linger overlong about the well
To tattle with each other and to catch
The ever-ready eyes of passing men.
Go fetch them back, and bid them quick prepare
The evening meal.

ANNA. Thy handmaid goes in haste. (*Exits.*)

HADASSAH. (*Brings him water in a cup*)
Drink this, my father, cool, just from the spring.
Then will I wash thy feet and fan thy brow.

MORDECAI. Nay, daughter, call a maid to do the task.

HADASSAH:

I love to wait on thee. Forbid me not,
The while we talk together.

MORDECAI:

No daughter

Of my loins could be to me what thou art, Hadassah!

HADASSAH.

I quite forget I am not thine own child.
Thou knowest I recall no other sire;
Thou hast been all my parents from my youth.

MORDECAI:

I oft remember how a tiny babe
I took thee from thy dying mother's arms.
A strong man was thy father, but the exile
Quite broke his heart: my father's, too, but he
Was bent with years. He was the eldest son
Of Shimei's house. Thy father was the youngest.

HADASSAH. Canst thou remember all those
frightful days?

MORDECAI:

No, Hadassah, I was too young. Yet I
Remember well the grief of all my kin;
Those tears of age so scalding to a babe.
I saw my father full of years bowed down
With sorrow to his grave. I saw
My haughty kinsmen bend their necks beneath
The yoke, and kiss the rod. I saw our ways
Despised; our customs flouted; our worship
Made a mock; our God denied, and this fire god,
This Ahuramazda, praised in his stead.
Yet still I live, and hope, and pray, and wait.

HADASSAH: Tell me once more about Jerusalem.

MORDECAI:

Ah, Hadassah, I was too young to have my mind
Retain much of that splendor. Yet methinks
I still can see the temple stand, all glorious.
It was built of cedar wood and fir trees
Overlaid with gold. Blazoned it was
With jewels all within. 'Tis indistinct
Yet vivid, like a dream, which comes, then fades.
It would seem the tales of Jair, my father,
Give it more color than my memory.

HADASSAH:

I wonder if my feet will ever stand
Within thy gates, O great Jerusalem?

MORDECAI:

It is the city of the king. It draws
Each Jew, as the lode star doth draw
All metals to itself.

HADASSAH:

Our future is so dark, we need a star.

MORDECAI:

A star—wait—that reminds me of my dream,
A curious dream. A dream I had last night.
It came as morning broke and it has held
My thoughts until this hour.

HADASSAH :

Tell it me, Mordecai.

MORDECAI :

Methought I saw a star of wondrous light
And perfect beauty, rise here in this land
And slowly take its way towards the west.
Its rays fell on the heathen who fell down
And worshipped at its passing. It rested
At Jerusalem above the throne of the Messiah.
By its light the gentiles saw his majesty
And power, and brought him gifts and homage.
Angels sang, and even lowly shepherds
Saw its beauty. Then it faded, and I awoke.
But all this day I've pondered o'er its meaning.

HADASSAH :

How wonderful! It must foreshadow forth
Some great event. What could it mean?

MORDECAI :

I think it means that one of us shall rise
And save this people; that by his great light
The heathen shall perceive and understand
Our greatness and the greatness of our God.

HADASSAH :

Would that he might rise soon! For now we rest
In constant peril, do we not, my Father?

MORDECAI :

An exiled race, which by its conquerors
Is held in scorn and hatred, must always be
In peril of its life. We are a shred,
A remnant of a once mighty people,
Yet we hold the faith. Through Red Sea perils,
Through the wilderness, the Lord our God hath
Brought us, by his grace.

Oft hath he saved us

From wicked men and our own naughtiness.
We have been scattered and made subject for

Our great transgressions. Still there's a remnant left.

Still there is leaven, to leaven the whole lump.

The Lord is on our side, so we care not
What man can do against us!

HADASSAH :

I shall be
Ever thinking of thy dream. We'll watch
Each night at dusk for the new star. We must
Not miss it.

MORDECAI :

It will find us as always
On the watch. There,

(As she puts on his sandals again.)

I am much refreshed.

*(The maidens enter and put food before MORDECAI
and HADASSAH.)*

Bless Thou this food, O Lord.

*(The maidens wait on them passing food and water,
etc.)*

HADASSAH :

Thou hast not told me if there is aught new
About the palace. Didst thou see Hegai?

MORDECAI :

Yes, I have talked to him. Thou knewest his mother
Was a Jew, a Benjamite, dead at his birth?
He was brought up quite ignorant of all
Our sacred customs, and of the true God.
I talked to him to-day. Hegai hath abandoned
This Mazdao, this deity of fire,
To worship our Lord God. Outwardly he

Gives lip service like so many others
Who follow Zoroaster, but in his heart
He's with us. Ah, I had most forgot,
He told me some small gossip of the court.
It seems last night the king, Ahasuerus,
Gave a great feast to satraps of his realm
And many visiting princes from afar.
When heated with much wine, he offered them
A vision of the beauty of his queen.

(HADASSAH utters an exclamation of astonishment.)

I know, my daughter, 'twas unworthy, quite.
But Hegai says that he was mad with wine.
She, too, was feasting with her womenkind
When came a slave commanding her to come
To the king's presence in her royal robes.

HADASSAH. And she?

MORDECAI:

Refused. Then sent he seven men,
His chamberlains, to bring her to his side.
This time she sent a haughty answer back
Saying she was no show for lesser men,
But just the king, her sovereign and her lord.
Then waxed the king exceeding wroth, and so
Did all the princes who did banquet there,
Saying, "If so the queen may disobey,
No woman in the kingdom will bow down
And do her husband's will." At this the king
Demands what he should do with such
A stiff-necked woman? Straight made they answer,
"Let her be cast down from her high estate, and
made a slave
Where she has ruled a queen; then seek throughout
Thy kingdom for a maid, who shall be worthy
To enjoy the light of thy most august
Presence, and to sit beside thee on thy throne

In royal state, and yet obedient
To thy smallest wish."

HADASSAH. And did the king in this wise?

MORDECAI:

Hegai was not sure. He doubteth much
If Ahasuerus will degrade the queen.
She holds him in the hollow of her hand.
For she is like the moon flower at the dusk
For beauty. Rose petals fresh with dew,
Such is her skin; her breath is lily perfume,
And her eyes do shine like stars upon
A winter's night. His heart is tangled in her
Rippling hair, and will not easily be taken thence.
Hegai thinks the morn will make him pause
When fumes of wine have died out of his brain.

HADASSAH:

How could she trifle with a love so great?
"The king he is thy Lord; him shalt thou serve."
So says the psalmist.

MORDECAI:

Yes, but David's words
Form not the rule of life for such as she.

HADASSAH. Hast seen Lord Haman?

MORDECAI:

Aye, he waxeth great
And greater every day. Alone I stood
Erect in all the crowd who bowed and fell
Down prostrate as he passed. If looks could kill
Then would I live no more, for in his eyes
Were poisoned arrows set to strike
Upon my heart, and slay me as I stood.

HADASSAH. I fear him, Father.

MORDECAI:

I do fear him, too,
But more I fear to bow myself before
A man or image. Jews abase themselves
But to their God, and I—I am a Jew.

My veins run hot with blood of mighty kings.
 I will not bow to Haman though I die.
 Nor yet, he'll find has he become so great
 That he dare try to force me to his will.

(Enter ANNA in great excitement.)

ANNA:

O master, hast thou heard the edict sent
 Through all the land, and posted on the gates
 Of Shusan?

MORDECAI:

An edict, damsel?

Pray what says the skin?

ANNA:

It orders that fair virgins shall be sought
 And brought from far and near to Hegai;
 He, when their purification shall be done
 Will bring these to the king for him to choose;
 And if there be a maiden fair enough,
 Ahasuerus, even our mighty king,
 Will take her to himself and make her queen,
 And place her on the throne, the throne of Vashti.
 And rumor goes that haughty Vashti has become
 A slave!

MORDECAI. Then it was true as Hegai hath said!

HADASSAH:

What power for good hath Vashti cast aside?
 To serve as slave where once she reigned the queen!

ANNA:

Methinks that every Persian maid will try
 To deck her charms, and pray that Hegai
 May find her fair; then will she have the chance
 To pass in turn before the king himself.

HADASSAH. (Musingly)

She should be like the almond tree in bloom,
 With eyes like flax flowers after summer rain!

Her walk should be the lily in the wind;
Her hair spun sunshine; while her dewy lips
Should be pomegranates parted over pearls!

MORDECAI. (*Who has been listening and watching HADASSAH*)

Nay, Hadassah—and why should not her hair
Be like ripe olives, or the raven's wing?
Her eyes, be forest pools at midnight?
Vashti was fair: perchance the mighty king
Would rather choose a maid of darker hue.

(*With a wave of the hand he dismisses the maids who have been serving the food. Then he turns to ANNA.*)

I fain would be alone with Hadassah.

(*All exit except MORDECAI and HADASSAH. A long pause during which he walks up and down. She looks wonderingly at him.*)

My daughter, has thou never thought to wed?
Hast seen a man who stirs thy maiden heart?

HADASSAH:

Why ask me that, my Father? Well thou knowest
All my acquaintance. Though I am lowly
Yet I can't forget that thou and I
Are of a kingly line. No man has stirred my pulse,
Nor no man should, unless he be as noble
As myself.

MORDECAI:

I knew we were a stiff-necked generation.
I did expect an answer no less proud.

(*He pauses.*)

Wilt go to Hegai and prefer thy claims

To be presented to this Persian king?

HADASSAH. (*Astonished*)

If it should be thy wish, so is it mine,
But, Father, well thou knowest that no Jew
Could ever hope to sit upon the throne.

MORDECAI:

Why need it to be known thou art a Jew?
None except Hegai need the secret share,
Nor he if we think wise. He hath not seen
Thy charms. He does not know thee for my daughter;

Though I should deem it best, since Hegai
Is my friend, that he should know the secret
Of thy race.

HADASSAH:

But my name?

None but a Jewess is called Hadassah.

MORDECAI:

Hadassah shall vanish. In her place shall come
A maid of Persian name. All except Hegai
Will think she comes from distant parts.

HADASSAH. Anna could go with me?

MORDECAI. If thou desirest.

HADASSAH:

I love her more than all my handmaidens,
And she hath knowledge far above her station.
May we consult her?

MORDECAI. As you please.

HADASSAH. (*Goes to door and calls*) Anna!

(ANNA enters.)

ANNA. Here am I, Mistress.

HADASSAH:

Anna, I would speak
Upon a matter of most grave import.
Mordecai desires I try my fortune

To appear before the king.

ANNA:

O wonderful! So shalt thou be the queen
And reign in Vashti's stead——

HADASSAH:

Silence,

Thou chatteringer! There is small hope
That I should be the choice among such hosts
Of beauty. If I go, wilt thou go with me
As a Persian maid? For none must know our race.

ANNA:

Gladly will I go, and stay forever by thee,
If so Ahasuerus should choose thee
To be his queen.

MORDECAI:

That choice is with the Lord.
We will pray to him. If it be his will
That Hadassah be queen, perchance great good
May come to all us Jews, who languish
Exiles in this foreign land.

ANNA:

But how

Shall we be called, that none shall know our birth
Or race?

MORDECAI.

We must consider that.

Thou canst answer to Nicaso; 'tis a name
Well known and common: now for Hadassah——

ANNA. (*Looking lovingly at her mistress*)

It needs must be a name as beautiful
As she herself. Such name were hard to find.

HADASSAH:

Thou flatterer! Ah, Anna, if all the world
Saw with thine eyes I should be queen indeed.

ANNA. 'Twould be thy right.

MORDECAI:

Peace, chatteringers!

This business cannot wait. We needs must choose
A name. Then I'll away to Hegai
And ask if he'll present thee to the king.
Let us consider. Likest thou Nourmahal?

HADASSAH:

Light of the Harem? Nay, I like it not.
It soundeth like a concubine, not queen.

MORDECAI. Light of the world Nourjehan. Lik-
est thou that?

ANNA. 'Tis hard to speak. It sticks upon the
tongue.

MORDECAI. Zobeide? Zulieka? What of those?

HADASSAH. (*Shaking her head*)
I like them not. I think no foreign name
Would suit my fancy. Choose thou alone.
Really it matters not what I am called
For a brief twelvemonth.

MORDECAI:

Hadassah, I feel
'Tis for no twelvemonth, but for all thy days.

ANNA:

I like the sound of Esther, for a queen:
Queen Esther—that is music to the ears.
The king's the sun, the queen should be a star,
A glowing star rather than the cold moon
These Persians love so much.

MORDECAI:

Esther! A star!
A star was in my dream. God spoke
The word with Anna's lips. It is a sign
Thou shalt be queen and more; for by thy light
These heathen shall see clear, and in thy rising
Our race that languishes in night and fear
Shall rise again. The Lord is with us. He
Hath told thy name. The Lord shall keep
Thy going and thy coming, from this time forth
And still forevermore. Blessed be Our Lord,

The God of Israel, from everlasting
Even to everlasting.

ANNA and HADASSAH. Amen.

MORDECAI:

I go to Hegai. Prepare thyself
To enter in his custody.

(*He takes her in his arms.*)

Farewell, my Hadassah. Like Abraham of old
I offer thee to God to do his will,
With certain faith that he will save my child
As he did Isaac from the knife and fire.
Remember always thou art Esther now,
The bright star of my dream. Through Hegai
I'll send thee counsel oft and messages
Of comfort and of love. Art pleased, my daughter?

HADASSAH:
I am content as always, Mordecai,
To do thy will.

MORDECAI:

I hope to bring great news
When I return. Again farewell. The Lord
Watch between thee and me when we are absent
From one another.

(HADASSAH bows her head as he blesses her and exits.)

ANNA:
Esther, the queen! It hath a pleasing sound,
Like to the bulbul singing to the night.

HADASSAH. (*Musing*)
Like to the bulbul singing to his mate.
I wonder,—will the king of all the world
Desire my darkness? Vashti was so fair.

ANNA:

She was the sun at noon, who scorches those
Who bask within her light. Thou with thy raven
hair

And eyes like midnight pools; with thy soft smile
And wise and tender heart, art like the cool night
After a fierce day, which all men sigh for.

HADASSAH:

I pray thy words prove true. But get thee
Again to work. I'll surely need the fair
Fruit of thy loom.

(ANNA returns to her weaving, and ESTHER sits again. She picks up the scroll and turning it, apparently idly, begins to read aloud.)

"Forget also thine own people and thy father's
house;
So shall the king desire thy beauty:

(A pause.)

She shall be led unto the king in broidered work:
The virgins her companions that follow her shall be
brought unto thee.
With gladness and rejoicing shall they be led:
They shall enter into the king's palace.

(Again she pauses and sits dreaming a moment.)

I will make thy name to be remembered in all genera-tions!"

(An exalted expression comes over her face, the scroll drops from her hand and she gazes as though into the future as the curtain slowly falls.)

ACT II

One year has elapsed.

The scene is the inside of a great tent in the gardens of the king's palace. It is hung with magnificent draperies of white and green and blue. An entrance at left draped with a curtain, gives admittance from the women's quarters. At left and right back are two other entrances, from both of which the curtains are partly draped back. At the right is seen the entrance to a passageway. This passageway leads to the women's apartments in the palace proper.

Near the center of the stage is a raised dais on which is the royal divan. Back and to the right of it is a low table with scrolls and writing materials with a stool behind on which will sit the scribe or maker of chronicles. There are a few other divans near the dais and in the lower left corner is a pile of cushions on which will recline the virgins who are to be inspected to-day.

At rise of the curtain, HAMAN, a handsome figure in court dress, enters by the opening at the right center. A moment later the curtain at the left, the entrance to the women's apartments, is drawn aside, and a beautiful slave enters. This is VASHTI, formerly the queen. She advances cautiously but stops on seeing HAMAN, and waits for him to approach.

HAMAN:

Away, slave! (*Suddenly recognising her.*) Vashti!

This is madness!

Disgrace for me, and death perchance for you
If we are seen.

VASHTI:

You did not use to fear
My presence, Haman. You sought my favours
On your bended knees.

HAMAN. The times have changed.

VASHTI:

Ay,
And may change again. Take care, Lord Haman,
Lest in fear, thou be not always on
The winning side, thou dost not overleap!
Mine were the favours which made thee what thou
art!

Take care, thou dost not need my help again!

HAMAN. (*Fawningly*)

I need all help, and I would give all help,
But now a twelvemonth's slave, thou canst not hope
The king takes thought of thee.

VASHTI:

I know he does.
He can find none but me to fill his arms.
He longs for me in watches of the night.
Remembrance of my charm hath made him pass
A hundred virgins by unnoticed.
Four only now remain. Think you he'll find
A queen among those few? But yesterday
I heard he asked of me. I shall return.

HAMAN:

Perchance. I know he grows impatient,
And is moody because he finds no maid
To take thy place. But what can Haman do?

VASHTI:

Bring me to mind. Talk of my beauty.

How wonderful I looked upon his throne!
How worthy the great honor once he gave!

HAMAN:

No man dare speak thy name before the king.

VASHTI:

Which means, thou dare not. Coward that thou art!
Then go! The time will come when thou wilt wish
Thou hadst paid heed to slave as well as queen!

HAMAN:

I'll guard against that time.

(VASHTI, with a look of hatred, slips back between the curtains of the door just as HEGAI and MORDECAI enter at left center. HAMAN proudly acknowledges the salute of HEGAI who salaams low before him. MORDECAI inclines his head as HAMAN does. HAMAN turns to him.)

HAMAN:

Insolent Jew,
Upon thy servile knees!

MORDECAI. Lord Haman, I kneel but before my God.

HAMAN:

Take heed, dog, I will bring thee to the ground
Beneath my feet ere I am done with thee.

(HAMAN exits left center.)

HEGAI:

Thou makst a bitter enemy of him.
Would thou couldst give lip service as I do;
He grows in favour daily. Good were it
To have him for thy friend.

MORDECAI:

Hegai,
Not for the favour of the king himself

Would my knees crook except to God, my Lord.

HEGAI:

Thou'rt bent on self-destruction. I have learned
'Tis hard to stand upright in palace walls.

MORDECAI:

I walk in palaces as I would walk
Upon Judea's hills—a Hebrew prince!
What news of Esther?

HEGAI:

She's like a doe beside the water brooks
For beauty. She'll be among these last
The king doth view to-day. He wearies
Of the business. Few are kept even as concubines.
The most he hath returned to their own homes.
I hope, and yet I dread the outcome.
Much I fear his thoughts still turn to Vashti.
Bitter and full of hatred at her fall
She'd work great evil should she mount again.

MORDECAI:

Could I have speech with Esther? My heart yearns
To hear her voice, lo, now these many days.

HEGAI:

'Tis a great risk, but I might run it if
There still be time. Bide here a moment.
I seek Shaashgaz, to learn the time the king
Would seek the maids. Stay out of sight
In case some one appears. 'Tis better that
No man should see thee here.

(HEGAI exits and MORDECAI moves over behind the dais near the table of the scribe. From this place he is out of sight of the actors in the next scene, while he can see and overhear. Again VASHTI cautiously pushes aside the curtain, and thinking the tent is empty steals to the door by which MORDECAI and HEGAI entered. As she approaches this entrance, BIGTHAN and TE-

RESH appear in the doorway. She beckons them to come in and the three go down to left front.)

VASHTI:

I'm glad that thou art come. A moment hence
I hurried out thinking I heard thy tread
And met Lord Haman, proud Amalekite!
Cowardly dog!

TERESH:

Did he ignore thy blood, thy royal state——?

VASHTI:

He but remembered that I am a slave,
A former stepping stone to his high place.

BIGTHAN. (*Putting his hand on his sword*)
Thou still hast kinsmen! Say, shall we avenge——?

VASHTI. Lop not the branch; it falls when falls
the trunk.

TERESH. The trunk? What meanest thou?
Surely not the——

VASHTI:

King?

Perhaps. Why not? He is a mortal man
Whom steel will kill. To-day he sees the last
Of all those virgins offered for his queen.
But one has any chance, a rose of dusk,
I curse the day whereon she saw the light!
Yet there is hope. If none of these succeed
Then may I mount again. He needs
But small excuse to bend his pride to his desire.
And if I triumph, weep, my enemies!
But should he choose a maid, I languish here
A slave forever, while my kinsmen, you
Will fall as surely as the ripened fruit.
A new queen will have minions of her own.

BIGTHAN. What shall we do? We wait but thy
commands.

VASHTI:

Ahasuerus shall not see the night
Of that dark day he takes another queen!

TERESH: Thou hast a plan?

VASHTI:

I have; and 'twill succeed
If in my kinsmen's veins runs blood not milk.

TERESH:

The thought of all thy wrongs makes them run fire.
Say on, what is thy will?

VASHTI:

Through yonder passage way the king must go
To lead the virgin to the royal rooms;
If he doth choose a queen, stand you within
The folds on either side and stab him deep
As he goes by.

BIGTHAN: And we——?

VASHTI:

Escape outside
Before the hue and cry. Then enter by this door
Aghast of countenance and torn with grief.

TERESH:

That will we do. The trunk shall fall in sooth,
And many branches will be carried down
And much fruit spilled when we have done our work.

VASHTI:

Here are two daggers, cunningly prepared
With points that bite and poison as they strike.
Take care you are not scratched. Go! Linger not!

BIGTHAN:

No queen shall ever sit in Vashti's place!

TERESH:

Burn incense to Mazda for his aid!

VASHTI:

Quick, some one comes!

(VASHTI slips back into the door at the left, while

BIGTHAN and TERESH disappear down the passage at the right. As they vanish MORDECAI sits in the scribe's seat and is writing rapidly as HEGAI enters.)

HEGAI:

The king will make his choice within the hour.
He's in a hasty and impatient mood.
I fear no maid will please. What dost thou, friend?
Thou must be off. I dare not let thee wait.

MORDECAI:

One moment only. I would send a word
To Esther, but a line.

(He continues writing, then hands the scroll to HEGAI.)

Give this to her
And bid her to mark its contents well,
Then give it to the king. I'll wait without.
Thou'll 't tell me the result when it is known?

HEGAI:

Trust me, my friend, I know a father's heart.
Pray to thy God. If He hath any power
He'd best show it to-day. I've never seen
The king in such a mood.

MORDECAI:

God is our refuge and our strength;
A very present help in time of trouble.
I go to pray to Him.

(MORDECAI exits. HEGAI claps his hands and armed black slaves enter and take their stations one on either side of each door. HEGAI then goes to the left entrance and raises the curtain.)

HEGAI:

Quick, with the maidens! Is all ready?

A SLAVE. (*As she enters*)
They come at once, my lord.

(SLAVES, VASHTI among them, enter and arrange the cushions in lower left of stage. Then enter the four maidens with their handmaids, among whom are ESTHER and NICASO. The virgins are veiled. They recline upon the cushions, while their handmaidens arrange a last fold of their robes or an escaped tress of hair, so that they may appear more perfect before the king. HEGAI, standing in center of stage, calls ESTHER to him, just before she is about to sit.)

HEGAI. Esther!

ESTHER. (*As she approaches*) Yes, Hegai.

HEGAI:

Thy father bade me give this scroll to thee.
Mark what it says, then give it to the king
If chance doth serve. He's in an impatient mood.
If thou canst sooth him, thou'llt deserve a crown.

ESTHER:

I can but try. I pray the Lord anoint me
With oil of gladness; make the king to see
The love I bear him. Love doth work all things.

HEGAI. I hope, but have small faith. Back, to thy place!

(ESTHER returns and reads the scroll given her by HEGAI. There is a fanfare of trumpets and the curtain at the right center is lifted by two slaves. Then two slaves armed with great axes enter and take their places on either side of the dais. Then comes the scribe who takes his place at the table. SHAASHIGAZ and HARBONAH enter and wait on either side of the door as the king comes through. They then join and accompany

him to the divan on the dais, where he sits, while they stand near him. After these come two more armed slaves. The king is dressed in a costly crimson robe. On his head is a richly jewelled turban. He carries a small golden sceptre, and has a dagger in his sash. HEGAI approaches the throne. The king extends his sceptre to him perfunctorily. HEGAI prostrates himself. The four virgins rise.)

AHASUERUS:

Thy maidens are not worth a kingly glance.
The last I would not have for concubines.
Unveil these maids! Thy rank and future state
Hang in the balance. Thou wast to bring a queen;
Thou hast brought none but slaves. Quick! Unveil!
Then I'll appoint a judge of womenkind
To take thy place.

HEGAI. (*Prostrating himself*)

O king, have mercy!

Well, I know no maid is worthy of thy grace,
Because thou art perfection. From Ethiop
To the Ind I've searched; May one
Find favour in thy sight!

(*At the KING's bidding the maids have unveiled.
Now, at a sign from HEGAI they come to the
foot of the dais.*)

AHASUERUS:

Damsels, approach; and let me see thine eyes.

(*Suddenly he notices ESTHER. He looks at her as though fascinated. He waves the others back and rising comes slowly towards her. HEGAI with the others draws back, watching the KING with anxiety and hope.*)

AHASUERUS :

Maiden ! What art thou called ?

ESTHER. Esther, my lord.

KING :

Esther ? A star ? Thou art a star indeed.
The evening star that glimmers in the dusk ;
The star of morning ere the dawn appears ;
The star of love in my long night of gloom.
Why art thou here ?

ESTHER :

To be thy handmaid, lord, or else thy slave.
I would rest near thy presence and reflect
The light thy countenance sheds on all around.
Thou wert my love from my youth up. In dreams
I served thee as a child. I see thee
And I'm like to swoon with joy.

KING :

Thou art the new moon in the purple dusk !
Thou art the almond tree in early spring !
Thy eyes are like deep pools beside a rock ;
Thy breath the breeze that blows from orange flow-
ers ;
Thy hands are butterflies ; thy maiden form
Is as a lily swaying in the wind.
I love thee ! I have longed for thee at night ;
And at the dawn, and in the noon tide heat ;
I wanted thee when in the camphire trees
The bulbul sang ; thou art to other maids
As sapphire stones to clay. Dost love me, Esther ?

ESTHER :

O king, my heart doth open at thy words
As lotus lilies to the sun at noon.

(She prostrates herself before him.)

Thou art my sun ; I live but in thy light ;

My soul lies open for my lord to see.

KING. (*Lifting her up and embracing her*)
Kneel not to me; so falls the cowering slave,
And I would have thee for my love, my queen,
My risen star to shine o'er all the world,
And reign with me in ever royal state.

ESTHER:

Thy handmaid sinks in ecstasy beneath
Thy royal favour.

KING:

My senses win before thy loveliness!
Even this night shall see our wedding feast.
Then will I gratify thy lightest wish;
Cities shall send their ransom unto thee;
Tyre's offering shall be her rarest silks;
Artificers in Ninevah shall know
No rest, till thou art laden down with gold
Worked cunningly as none but they know how;
The Ind shall send thee ointments sweet, and pearls;
Thebes shall bring ivory; while maids
Of Babylon shall broider costly veils
To shield thy face.
What shall I give thee for a wedding gift?
Ask to the half of all my kingdom's worth.

ESTHER:

O king, my lord, I ask a single boon;
Read thou the contents of this scroll,
Sent by a friend; 'tis for thine eyes alone.

AHASUERUS. (*Frowning*)

Another's favour?

I had rather thou preferred a wish of thine.

(*His expression changes as he reads.*)

"Know that Bigthan and Teresh have plotted
with Vashti to kill the king if he shall choose a

queen. In proof thereof they lurk between the curtains of the passage which leadeth to the apartments for the queen. Upon their persons are two daggers sharp, tipped with a deadly drug, so that a scratch will end his life.

“Signed,

“MORDECAI.”

Quick, slaves! Search in the hangings of the way
That leadeth to the palace. We will know
If there is aught of truth in what he writes.

(HARBONAH leading the way, four slaves bring forth
BIGTHAN and TERESH from the passage.
VASHTI stands among the women slaves in fear
and anger at the frustration of her plans.)

Search for their daggers. Careful! They are tipped
With venom deadly as an adder's tongue.

(There is a slight scuffle as the slaves take the weapons.
They display the two daggers to the KING.)

Fools! Who enjoyed my favours!

(He again mounts the dais, taking ESTHER with him.
He wraps her in his cloak as he draws her down
beside him on the divan. He turns to the two
conspirators.)

The music of a jealous woman's tongue
Hath lured thee to thy doom, and made thee strike
The root that nourished thy tree of life!
Away with them to slow and torturing death!
Let multitudes behold their agonies

That all may know the fate which waits for those
Who dare attempt aught evil 'gainst their Lord.

TERESH. (*Falling in the arms of the slaves*)
Too late, O king! Dark death is not thy slave
To come and go as thou dost order.

BIGTHAN. (*As he, too, falls dying*)
The poison of these daggers was well made!

AHASUERUS:
Treacherous to the last! Take them away,
They're carrion for the dogs! One yet is left
Who shall not so escape.

(*He glances towards the corner where VASHTI cow-
ers, while the slaves remove the bodies of TE-
RESH and BIGTHAN.*)

HEGAI. What of the slave, O king?

AHASUERUS:

Hegai,

Thou shalt answer for her life. She shall not die.
Death were too good for her. Nay, she shall live
And see my happiness.

She shall thirst for my favour as he thirsts
Who travels without drink for many days
In a great desert, and sinks down at last
In sight of crystal pools he may not reach;
Hearing the plashing stream he may not touch;
While others bathe and drink beneath the shade.

(*VASHTI gives a moaning cry as she sinks down and
slaves drag her out of door at left. The KING
turns to ESTHER.*)

My star, this was no boon for thy sweet self;
It was a gift, a princely gift from thee;
The gift to me of life, now doubly precious

Since I have thy love. Health, power and riches,
These I had before; within the hour thou'st
Added love and life. A gift fit for a queen
To bring her lord.

ESTHER. (*Pointing to the scroll*)
My lord, I brought thee love, 'twas all I had,
The life was from another.

AHASUERUS:
But through thy hand.

(*He takes her hand and presses it to his lips.*)

That hand as soft and white, as almond petals
'Neath a silver moon. I had forgot.

(*He turns to the scribe and hands him the scroll.*)

Inscribe this in our book of chronicles.
"This Mordecai, who giveth life to kings,
I shall delight to honour." Put it down,
"That King Ahasuerus was by him,
Saved from two serpents." He will find, the King
Of all the World knows how to recompense.

(*He turns to ESTHER and leads her down from the dais.*)

Come, my star, Shaashgaz shall lead thee with thy
womankind,
To the apartments set aside for thee.
Thy royal robes await thee. Now farewell,
Until our wedding feast. Each hour will seem
A year, a century, until I hold
Thee in my arms, my queen.

(SHAASHGAZ precedes her with slaves, followed by

NICASO and another handmaid. Then the KING and ESTHER approach the entrance to the passageway as the curtain slowly falls.)

ACT III

SCENE I

Two years have elapsed. The scene is laid in a small tiring room in the apartments of QUEEN ESTHER in the palace at Shusan. An entrance at left and at center back to be closed with curtains.

At the rise of the curtain the queen is seen reclining on a divan while two or three female slaves or handmaidens are adorning her. One combs her long hair and entwines it with jewelled chains. One tints her fingernails with henna. One anoints her feet with perfumed ointment and then puts on her sandals.

She is dressed in a rose-colored robe of soft, heavy silk and holds a metal mirror in her hand. At her right near the head of the couch is a low stand whereon are apples in a dish and a dish of sweetmeats. A flagon of wine also stands there, with a golden goblet. She sips this from time to time.

ESTHER:

I'll wear my pearls to-day. Their rainbow tints
And shy soft gleam suit well my present mood.
Emeralds and rubies, those bright gems whose sparks

Incite and charm, I'll don whene'er the king
Pleases to send for me.

(*Holds up a string of pearls.*)

Strange swelling beauties!
Brought forth in agony to hide the pain
Within a narrow shell. Thee will I wear
To show my heart doth languish for its lord.

(*NICASO enters with a large tray bearing many pots and bundles and boxes of herbs and ointments.*)

What hast thou there?

NICASO:

O queen, a dusky merchant of the Ind,
Here offers ambergris, and camphire leaves,
Spikenard and saffron, myrrh and cinnamon,
Aloes, frankincense, and the oils of rose
And jasmine flowers. Here's calamus,
And unguent made in secret, which he swears
Will keep the flesh like roses steeped in musk.
What shall I buy?

ESTHER:

I know not which to choose.
Spices and herbs do always tempt my purse.
O—let me have them all! Doth he bring silks
Or stuff of camel's hair?

NICASO:

No, O queen,
This Indian brings but wares as thou seest here.

(*She puts down her tray and gazes admiringly at the QUEEN.*)

How very fair thou art to-day, my Esther!
Hath the king sent for thee to come to him

After these many days?

ESTHER:

Alas! Not yet.

Full thirty weary days have dawned and died
Since I have seen my lord.

NICASO:

It hath been longer
Many times before.

ESTHER:

Ay, when he journeyed,
Or was at the wars.

NICASO:

The rumor goes
Lord Haman hath been much with him of late.

ESTHER:

I fear that man. What news of Mordecai?

NICASO:

All yesterday he stood outside the gate
That's called the king's in sackcloth and in shame,
As he hath stood for many days before.

ESTHER:

But what of Hegai? By him I sent
Fine raiment to my father, and a chain
Of purest gold.

NICASO:

He would none of it
And sent it back.

ESTHER:

His actions grieve me sore.
What sorrow hath befallen that he should weep
And wail these many days outside the gate?

(ESTHER sighs and NICASO approaches her timidly.)

NICASO:

O mistress mine, wouldst read again the psalms

Which oft of old brought comfort when thy heart
Was weighed with grief?

ESTHER:

Thanks, my Nicaso.
Many moons have waned since I have read
King David's hymns. I fear I had forgot
A Persian queen needs the same counsel
As a Jewish maid. Find me the book. But first
Finish thy business with this Indian.

(ESTHER indicates the tray. Enter a SLAVE.)

SLAVE. Hegai begs leave to have speech with the
queen.

ESTHER. Bid Hegai enter. (To NICASO.) Come
not till I call.

(Exit the SLAVE and NICASO. In a moment HEGAI
enters, back center. NICASO goes out at left.
HEGAI prostrates himself as did the SLAVE on
entering her presence.)

ESTHER:

Arise, and tell thy business. What news
Of Mordecai? Why hath he refused my gift?

HEGAI:

O queen, I come from Mordecai direct
To thee. He will have speech with thee.

ESTHER:

It is impossible. Thou knowest no man
Save thou, may enter here, except the king
Himself. He's surely mad!

HEGAI:

He doth insist. He says that life and death
Depend upon this interview.

ESTHER:

It might be death for all if he should come!
Can he not write?

HEGAI:

O queen, thou hast his message.
If thou wilt, it can be done. He waits without
Wrapped in a heavy cloak as any eunuch.
Let no handmaiden or no slave come in
Then is the danger small.

(*A pause as ESTHER hesitates.*)

It is thy father's will. Is it thine, too?

ESTHER. (*After a moment's hesitation*) His will
should still be mine. Bid him come in.

(*She snatches up a heavy veil and covers her face with it. HEGAI exits and a moment later MORDECAI wrapped in a heavy cloak which completely envelopes him, enters. He comes in with a stately stride. As the curtain closes behind him he lets fall his cloak and stands clad only in a garment of sackcloth tied around the waist with a hempen cord. ESTHER draws back in dismay at sight of his costume. He stands with folded arms looking at her.*)

MORDECAI. Peace to thee, Hadassah, and all this house!

ESTHER. (*Murmurs automatically*) And to thee,
Father, and to all thy race!

MORDECAI. Take off thy veil. I'd see my daughter's face.

(*She slowly removes the veil, then she comes towards him with outstretched arms, but he does not un-*

fold his arms, and she stands before him, her face expressing dismay and astonishment. In his presence it seems as though the Queen of Persia had once more become only the Jewish maiden.)

Thou startst back at my garb; and yesterday
Thou send'st me rich apparel. Wouldst thou heal
A sore by covering it up?

ESTHER:

What is thy sore?
Why art thou angry, Father?
I sought to cover up thy nakedness:
Say, why was that displeasing in thy sight?

MORDECAI:

Thou sittest in'the palace of the king;
On silken cushions stuffed with softest down;
Thy ears are filled with music such as steals
Away all thought and care; perfumes are in
Thy nostrils, and thy flesh anointed
With sweet oils is wrapped in silk and linen
Fine as the web of spiders.
For this was Esther brought into the world?
Thinkst thou that this is life? Then think again!
Hast thou forgot thyself, thy kin, thy race.
Hast thou forgot thy God, my Hadassah?
Even as thou sittest, death knocketh at thy door.

ESTHER:

Thy words are riddles, Mordecai. Are comforts then
So deadly?

MORDECAI:

Ay, when they stuff the ears 'gainst duty's call.

ESTHER:

What should I do that I have left undone?

MORDECAI:

Dost thou not know that even at this hour

Haman is closeted with thy lord, the king,
Plotting thy death and that of all thy race?
Ah, now thou start'st, yet I have but begun.
As day by day this Haman's power hath grown
So day by day hath grown his wrath and hate
Against thy father and against our race.
I would not crook my knee to win his grace.
I would not bow my head to such as he—
An Amalekite, a base-born heathen cur—
Though he should sit upon the very throne
Of the king's self. So hath he sworn revenge.
'Tis now ten moons since he beguiled the king
To sign an edict which will put to death
All Jews within his realm. Women and babes,
Old men and gallant youths, all to be harvested
By cruel swords; and for this he
Will pay a mighty sum, ten thousand talents,
Into the treasury, so goes the tale.

ESTHER. (*White and aghast*) When is this horrid, horrid doom to fall?

MORDECAI:
Men came to him, the priests of Mazdao,
And cast the Pur or lot, so he might fix
A time auspicious for his fiendish work;
It fell on the twelfth month, the thirteenth day.

ESTHER. Ten days from now——!

MORDECAI:
Thou sayst it. Hence thou seest
The time is short. On thee the burden falls.
Thou art the star must lead us through this night!
This remnant of a people must be saved!
I named thee, Esther—star—but for this hour;
Dost thou recall my dream? A star rose up
Out of this east, and moving westward stopped
Above Jerusalem; there did it rest
Until Messiah came. This remnant must

Be saved until he comes. Immanuel,
Who shall redeem the world! It is thy task,
My daughter.

ESTHER:

Gladly will I try. Ahasuerus
Hath not sent for me these thirty days;
Perchance this very hour cometh his summons.
Then will I intercede for my poor race.
I wait his message.

MORDECAI:

Wait! Thou wouldest wait,
When every moment lost but seals our doom
More surely?
Wait! for the pleasure of this Persian king?
Go! walk about the streets of Shusan! Hear
The weeping and the wailing of the Jews!
Then wait if still thou canst!

ESTHER:

But Mordecai, my kinsman, thou knowest well,
Who goes unbidden to our mighty king
May lose his life. Unless the king extends
His golden wand, even a queen's head falls.
I saw the head of a prince royal drop
Beneath the axe, for such presumption.

MORDECAI:

Wouldst rather hear the death cries of the babes
Ring in thine ears when thou wouldest sleep at night,
Than take such risk? Many, like me, are old,
Their sands are run, but youth—

ESTHER:

Father!

They dare not kill thee! Thou art my kinsman!
Kinsman of the queen!

MORDECAI:

Who knows I am thy kinsman? And besides
Thou, too, art of our race. All Jews

The edict runs; and under it thy life
Is forfeit. As for me, I will be first
To fall before the wrath of the Amalekite.

ESTHER. (*Sits horror-stricken before him*) O,
woe is me; where shall I look for help?

MORDECAI:

Our help is in the Lord's name, in our God.
Hast thou forgot thy psalms? "Yea, though I walk
Through the valley of the shadow of death
I fear no evil, for Thou art with me."
Go to the king, thy Lord; for this thing wast
Thou born. Not to lie down
In ivory palaces like heathen queens
But like a royal daughter of the Jews
To face even death, if need be, for our race;
To go forth in the Lord's name without fear
To save his people Israel!

ESTHER. (*Sitting with clasped hands in an agony
of spirit. She suddenly rises and stretches out her
hands in prayer*)

"Save me, O God, for the waters
Are come into my soul. I sink in deep mire
Where there is no standing. I am come
Into deep waters where the floods o'erflow me.
Hide not thy face from thy servant
For I am in trouble."

MORDECAI:

Amen. Go now, my Esther, to this king;
Go, in the name of thy race, which worships
The true God! Go in thy kinsfolks' name,
To whom thou ow'st allegiance! Go in
The name of friends whose lives hang on thy words!
Go, in Jehovah's name, who hath made thee
For this hour!

ESTHER:

Father, thy will be done.

Pray for me. Keep the fast. Let all the Jews
Abstain from meat three days. Send out the word.
I go unbidden to my lord, the king;
I perish, if I perish, for their sakes.

MORDECAI:

This will we do. Use all thy woman's wiles,
Thy native wit, to circumvent this man.
Now fare thee well. He will not slumber
That keepeth thee; he that keepeth Israel
Shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord
Bless thee and prosper thee!

(ESTHER bows her head as MORDECAI blesses her, then gathering up his cloak he wraps himself in it and swiftly exits. For a moment ESTHER remains as though stunned, then she straightens her shoulders as though for a burden and clasps her hands. NICASO enters.)

ESTHER:

Fetch me my richest robes. I'll wear my cloak
Of blue and green, shot with the gold of Ophir.
Drench me with roses; hang rich sapphires
On my neck, and in my hair; bring me
My finest veils, my golden crown; make me
As lovely as the rosy morn when first
It breaks above the mountain peaks
Of high Orontes.

NICASO. The king hath sent for thee?

ESTHER. No, Anna, yet I go unto the king.

NICASO. (Aghast) Esther! My queen! 'Tis
death to which you go!

ESTHER:

I know, but I must go to save the Jews.
Oh, people, that I have so long forgot
Amidst this palace's sensual delights!

My people, exiled, poor, despised, forsaken!
How could I have forgotten thee so long?
I'll save thee, or I'll perish for thy sake.
Like Isaac at my father's call, I go
To offer up my life a sacrifice.
God grant it may be pleasing in Thy sight!

(*As the maidens come in with the royal robes, the curtain falls.*)

SCENE II

In the throne room of the palace. It is a magnificent apartment of marble, the roof supported by pillars. The pavement is of red, yellow and black marble. Hangings of silk of green and blue and white are fastened with cords to rings of silver. The high throne of ivory and gold stands on a dais near the front. It is wide and high and above it are draperies of cloth of gold. On either side of it are smaller seats, and in front of one is a little tabouret or stool. On it rest scrolls. On the seat near this stool HAMAN is sitting at the rise of the curtain. He is holding one of the scrolls which is evidently a map and explaining about it to the KING. The KING, dressed in his richest robes, leans back on his throne and listens indulgently to HAMAN as to a favorite.

About the room are couches of gold and silver, and on these are sitting chamberlains and other members of the court, among whom are HEGAI, SHAASHGAZ and HARBONAH. On either side of the throne stand two huge blacks armed with glittering axes. Others guard the door. A

company of the KING's bodyguard of archers is ranged near the back of the room.

In the back center is a great doorway from which the curtain is partly draped back. Beneath this one may catch a glimpse of the palace gardens lying in the moonlight.

On the left is a doorway also curtained but closed leading to the apartments of the palace. Flambeaux light the room from tall candlesticks.

In a brazier, high and very ornate, burns a sacred fire in which SLAVES drop incense from time to time. Wine in gold and silver flagons is being passed by the SLAVES.

It is a scene of oriental splendor and ease, marked by a certain restraint which always accompanies the presence of the KING. To the right and a little behind the dais is the table of the scribe as in the second act. He sits there as before.

As the curtain rises AHASUERUS and HAMAN are in earnest conversation. More earnest on HAMAN'S part than the KING's, who seems only mildly interested.

HAMAN. (*Showing scroll*)

Thou seest here

How they extend through all thy kingdom, lord.

KING:

These lawless and unruly people are
In all my provinces it seemeth, Haman.

HAMAN:

In all, O king. And so they disaffect
Thy empire. They keep no laws of life save
Only theirs; they flout Ahuramazda.

(*Here he makes a slight obeisance towards the brazier wherein burns the sacred fire.*)

They will worship but this Jehovah, God
Of Israel, so do they name Him.
As I explained when first thou madest the edict,
It is not to the profit of the king
To suffer them to live. So went I to
The temple, and our priests before me cast
The Pur, the lot, to say which day should be
Their last. Ten days from now
Is the appointed time; then shall they perish;
Every Jewish soul shall be cut off, from
Babes to hoary men; when the sun rises
On the fourteenth day of Adar, not a Jew
Shall see his light!

KING:

Haman, it
Irks me thus to cut off babes and women—
I can kill in lust of battle as a
Soldier should—but maids and children—
Is it expedient thus to deal with them?

HAMAN:

Children who live after their sire is killed,
Wax stronger on their hate; besides
Thy priests have spoken.

KING:

Yes, I know.
Well, let it stand. Thou sayest 'twill bring much gold
Into our royal vaults?

HAMAN:

Ten thousand talents at the very least!
These people, though they seem in poverty,
Have yet great riches hidden in every house
In which they dwell.

KING:

And do they murmur
'Gainst our sacred person?

HAMAN :

They flout thee
In the persons of thy friends, those thou
Art pleased to favour ; yesterday
As I rode by the gate, one stood without
And would not do me homage. All the throng
Fell down before me as a prince of thine
Save only he. Erect he stood, and flung
A glance of scorn at me, thy servant,
Envoy of the king ! The people murmured
Saying, "Why should we fall prostrate
When this man is suffered to remain
Upright, and unrebuked ?" Sedition starts
From such small seeds.

KING. (*After a moment's thought*)
Thou speakest truth. Do even as thou hast planned.

(*At this moment the curtain is raised at the left, and ESTHER in her royal robes appears in the doorway. Her train is borne by SLAVES and she is supported on either side by two handmaidens, one of whom is NICASO. Her face is covered with a veil which covers her also from head to foot. She approaches the throne slowly and timidly. The KING watches in displeasure, and the two SLAVES with axes, who stand on either side the throne, step forward at a sign from him prepared to strike.*)

Who is this ? Who dares to come unbidden
To the king ?

(*ESTHER throws back her veil and stands at the foot of the dais gazing up into the KING'S face. As the axe-men step nearer she sinks in a heap at the foot of the throne. Instantly the KING holds*

forth his sceptre and leaping to his feet hastens to gather the QUEEN in his arms, and seating her beside him on the throne he puts the sceptre into her hands.)

My queen! My star! Wert thou in fear
 To come unbidden to our sacred throne?
 Fear not! The law of death for such as dared
 Was for our subjects, not for our own self,
 Which well thou know'st thou art.
 Take thou the sceptre! Rule thou in our stead!
 Why didst thou swoon? Hast thou recovered quite?
 My heart stopped beating when I saw thee fall!

ESTHER:

My lord, it is not easy to say why
 I fell before thee. But when I came
 And saw thee sitting on this golden seat
 In all thy power, thy greatness, and thy might,
 My spirit failed; my senses and my soul
 Seemed to depart. A long, slow moon I've sat
 In darkness; and my eyes were blinded
 When I came into the sun.

KING:

I was on the point
 To come to thee. It is a century
 Since I have felt thy beauty like a flood
 Pour o'er my spirit.
 Affairs of state have kept me from thy side;
 Night after night the dawn has found me still
 In council over matters of my realm.
 I would requite thee for thy presence here;
 Ask me a boon that I may give it thee,
 Even to the half of all my mighty land:
 Wouldst have a city? Great Persepolis?
 Ecbatana? Palmyra? They are thine!
 Or I will send to India and bring

A ruby for thee bigger than an egg.
Which shall it be?

ESTHER:

Oh, King,
My gracious lord, live thou an hundred years,
And when these pass, another hundred, e'en
Forever, Lord! One favour would I ask,
Of thy beneficence.

KING:

'Tis thine before
The words fall on mine ears.

ESTHER:

I pray that thou
And this great lord, high Haman as he stands
Beside thy royal throne, would come when the
Round sun hath set for the third time, and share
With me a banquet I'll prepare.

I beg thou'l so far honour me, my lord?

KING:

What sayest, Haman? Will the days not seem
A thousand years until we share
This banquet with our queen?

HAMAN. (*Bowing low*)

Most sovereign lady! Thy servant hath been
Honoured far beyond his high deserving.
Until three days, I shall have but one thought
To bid me live—that I'm to banquet
With my king and queen!

(*He makes a low obeisance to them both, then turns to the KING.*)

May I depart a moment
From thy sight? I would give last instructions
Concerning that grave matter and the plans
Of which we spoke.

KING. (*Graciously*)

But for a moment;
For the candles dim in this bright court
When they reflect no more the light of Haman's
presence.

(*Again HAMAN bows low and exits, by the door through which the QUEEN entered. The KING turns again to ESTHER.*)

Each time I greet thee after many days,
I do recall the time I saw thee first,
When thy fresh beauty struck upon my heart,
Blinding my eyes to all else in the world!

(*He turns to the scribe seated behind the throne.*)

Read me again the record made that night;
I do recall it dimly. (*To QUEEN.*) Wilt thou hear?

ESTHER. Thy will is mine.

KING. Read, slave!

SCRIBE:

"On this night Ahasuerus hath been saved
From the dread bite of two fierce serpents,
By the Jew, Mordecai; him would our king
Delight to honour."

KING. (*Interrupting*)

Ah, now I remember!

And how did I reward this Mordecai?

SCRIBE. There is no record, Lord.

KING:

What?

No honour hath been paid to such a man?

(*Enter HAMAN. He approaches the throne and the KING extends his sceptre as he prostrates himself.*)

Arise, O Haman, I would have thine ear.
Thou art the man of all the world, whose
Counsel I desire. Because thou art my friend,
Sincere, and true, I ask for thy advice.
How shall I honour one whom I love greatly ;
Whom I would reward after the manner
And in such a wise as doth agree
With my magnificence ?

(HAMAN stands silent for a moment. He is evidently under the impression that the KING is speaking of him.)

Speak freely,
From thy heart.
I feel no honour is too great for him !

HAMAN. (*Smiling in self-satisfaction*)
If that be so, O king, thus would I do
And I were in thy stead.
Say to the noblest prince within thy court,
“Go to this man ; wrap him in royal robes,
Even such robes as wears the king himself,
Purple, and linen, and a chain of gold
About his neck. Let this same noble
Lead this man before the king and make
Obeisance very low before the throne ;
But let this man stand upright as though equal
Even with Ahasuerus. Then let this prince
Place him upon the king’s most favorite horse,
Upon whose head the royal crown is set,
And lead him through the city’s crowded streets,
Crying aloud, “This is the man, our king
Doth most delight to honour with his love !”
So shall the people know the recompense
Thou metest out to him who wins thy favour.

KING :

Thou sayest well. Go. Do as thou hast said!
Get Mordecai, the Jew. Clothe him in robes
Such as our own. Bring him before our face.
He shall stand upright when thou bow'st thyself.
Then go before his horse and make the cry
Even as thou hast spoken. For thou
Art ever my true friend, and thy advice
Is good.

(*Crestfallen, HAMAN makes a profound obeisance before the throne, and goes slowly out. The QUEEN is radiant with delight. She kneels before the KING and kisses his hand.*)

ESTHER:

Great art thou, my **Lord**!

Thy benefits are ever just and right!

KING:

Justice should ever sit beside a king.
It is her place. No thanks are due for that.
'Tis mercy that should bring forth gratitude.

" (Looks at her admiringly.)

O queen, thou art as lovely as the rose
That blooms at dawn. Thy beauty greets me
As the sun at morn, renewed in splendor
By his night of rest. Dost ever love me?

ESTHER:

Lord, thou knowest well,

My heart is ever thine, both now and always!

KING:

Thine eyes are pools of truth. Thou art my **love**!

(He turns to the SCRIBE.)

Till Haman comes again, read to us more
About the early days of this our reign.

SCRIBE. So be it, Lord. (*Reads.*)

"And it came to pass in the days when King Ahasuerus came to the throne, he ruled over a great kingdom, even all the world, to Ethiopia and the Indies. And he set governors over the hundred and twenty-seven provinces in the third year of his reign, and there was great rejoicing. And it came to pass at that time that he made a costly feast for his friends, and for the nations of Persia, and for their governors, such as was proper for the king to make. After which he made a feast for other nations and for their ambassadors at Shusan. Moreover he sent messengers through the country and gave orders that they should have a remission of their labours, and should keep festival many days on account of his kingdom."

(*The KING holds up his hand as a sign for the Scribe to cease reading.*)

KING:

A worthy chronicle

That doth mind me of one who once was proud,
So proud, she braved the order of her Lord,
And even plotted 'gainst his royal life.

(*He pauses and muses a moment.*)

O queen, thou hast among thy slaves
A certain one named Vashti. For a jest,
That she may see with her own envious eyes
And hear with her proud ears, how all her plots
Are brought to naught, bid her to wait upon us
At the feast, thou purposeth to serve us

Three days hence, thy Lord and Haman.

ESTHER:

If 't be thy pleasure, Lord, it shall be done,
But much I dread to have her brought so near
Thy royal person. Her eyes are basilisks;
Venom is in her mouth. I fear, O king,
Such hatred as she bears may work thee ill.
I do beseech thee let her not approach!
She radiateth evil as the pestilence
Which stalks abroad unseen.

KING. (*Laughing*)

Fear not, my queen, I would but tease a snake
Whose fangs are drawn. There's naught to fear.
She is a guarded slave. Think of her crime!
The punishment is just
And shall be meted out as I have said.
I do decree that Vashti drink the dregs
Of bitterness and shame.

ESTHER. (*Sadly bowing her head*) Vashti shall
serve us at the feast O king.

(*At this moment the curtain is drawn aside and HAMAN enters, followed by MORDECAI in royal robes. The KING extends his sceptre and they advance to the foot of the dais. HAMAN prostrates himself, and MORDECAI is about to bow low when the KING stops him.*)

KING:

Nay, Mordecai, thou com'st here as my peer.
He who gives kings their lives need bow to no man.
I here demand thy pardon, that I left
Thy Godlike gift remain unrecompensed
These many months.

MORDECAI:

O, great king, live forever; Not to me

Owest thou thanks or recompense.
 The one God gave thee life; he holds it still
 Within the hollow of his holy hands.
 He did preserve it when those naughty men
 Would vilely cut it off.
 I was His humble instrument of grace.
 He led my feet where I might hear their plans;
 He brought the words to my swift, listening ears;
 He told my heart how I might bring to thee
 Their fell design. To Him
 The glory be throughout all generations!
 I praise the God of Abraham, the God
 Of Isaac, and of Israel! His name is Jah!

(He falls on his face prostrate as he says the last words.)

KING:
 Thy God must be indeed a mighty God
 If He can do these things.
 Thinkst thou he's greater than Ahuramazda?

MORDECAI. *(Rising)*
 None.
 Is like unto 'our God! There is no God
 But Him!

(There is a movement of unrest throughout the court and the people turn their eyes to the sacred flame which burns as before. ESTHER leans forward with delight and eagerness. The KING seems not to join in the general feeling of consternation at the temerity of the Jew.)

KING:
 I would hear more of Him. When this man *(Turning to HAMAN.)*

Hath finished his high progress through the streets
Bring him to lodge within the palace here.
I'll further talk with him about this God
Who can save kings and who is like none other.
It is a matter of much interest.
I thank thee, Haman, my most loyal friend,
Who hath so well advised me of the way
To pay my debts.
Take Mordecai, and lead him through the streets
Upon my noble horse as thou hast said;
Worthy indeed is he of all this honour!

(*MORDECAI and HAMAN retire from the KING's presence after bowing again to him, and the KING turns to ESTHER.*)

That God which Zoroaster taught us of
Hath failed me oft of late. Perchance this God
Of Israel of whom this man doth prate,
Hath yet more power. I'll learn of Him.

(*A pause during which the KING sits musing. Then he looks towards the open doorway, then back at the QUEEN.*)

A silver moon rolls in a sapphire sky.
The bulbul's soul pours out in liquid song
Unto the eager night. Within the shade
Of palm trees, blooms the rose; tall lilies spill
Their waxen chalices, to perfume
The night air. Come, my queen, into the gardens
On this night of love.
So will our senses swoon in ecstasy
Beneath such beauty. It will woo our souls

From sorry thoughts which fill the garish day.
Come, Esther, love!

*(They descend from the throne and start towards
the great doorway in the back as the curtain
slowly falls.)*

ACT IV

Three days have elapsed.

The banquet hall in the apartments of the QUEEN. It is hung with purple and gold draped back with cords of the same colors. In the center back is a wide doorway, the curtain from which is draped high. Through this doorway the KING, QUEEN, HAMAN and MORDECAI enter later. Back of the doorway is a hall and during the banquet a company of the KING's bodyguard of archers walk back and forth. At the left closed by a curtain is the door through which the MAIDS and SLAVES enter who serve the feast.

In the center of stage is a low, long table. Back of this and almost level with it are three couches, the one at the right of the center covered with a cloth of royal purple on which is worked the crown and sceptre. The two others are covered with gold cloth.

At the left against the wall and in front of the left doorway is a higher table on which are dishes of various kinds, flagons, goblets, etc.

The long table is elaborately decorated with dishes of fruit, apples, grapes and pomegran-

ates. Flowers are also in vases at each end, but nothing is so high as to at all interfere with the view of the audience. The couches are so high above the table that the whole body of the persons on the divans may be seen.

At rise of curtain, NICASO is giving the final touches to the flowers and fruit on the table. Two SLAVES, one of whom is VASHTI, are busy pouring the wine from large jars into the flagons, and arranging the dishes on the side table which are to be served first.

NICASO:

Is it not beautiful? I hope the queen
Will be well pleased. Those pomegranates are the
finest

I have seen since Adar last was here,
Twelve months ago. The slave was nearly drowned
Who plucked those lotus flowers, but even so,
Their beauty's worth the loss of one mean slave.
Is the wine ready? Forget not, the king
Must taste that vintage from Armenia
Which the queen sent for at such great expense!

VASHTI:

A moment and all things will have been done
Even as thou hast bidden. Now, I fill
The special flagon for the king himself.

NICASO:

Take care it be not over warm nor cold;
If so, the flavour's richness would be lost.

(Takes another look about to assure herself that all
is ready.)

I go to tell the queen, the banquet's served.

(Exits by door center back.)

VASHTI. (*Looking after her with hatred*)
They think to break my spirit—the spirit
Of haughty Vashti,
By making me to serve where once I ruled!
They think me powerless, a plaything
For their hatred, the tame sport of their spleen;
An idle leaf to be blown here and yon,
Where once I was the very wind itself
Whose softest breath did shake this court
To its foundation stones!
But this, shall be the end!

SLAVE:

Have a care, Vashti! If your game should fail
Your life may not be spared a second time.

VASHTI:

Be silent, worm! This time there'll be no slip.
For I employ no bungling go-betweens,
But do my work myself. A pleasant task
And one I'd rather do, than reign in Persia.
My hate has grown so that it must be fed
Before all else. Go! I will finish this.

(*Indicating the service table and the last placing of the flagons. The Slave exits. Vashti looks fearfully around, seeing no one she draws from her bosom a small glass phial. As she does so Nicaso appears at the center door. She is about to enter, then seeing Vashti she conceals herself partly behind the curtain and watches her. Vashti empties the contents of the phial in the flagon containing the King's special wine. She places this on the table near the King's divan. Then she drops the empty phial behind a huge water vase which is near the service table. With a smile of triumph, Vashti exists. A moment later Nicaso rushes to the water bottle and*

reaching down brings up the phial just as the royal party enters the hall. First come the black SLAVES, then the QUEEN and the KING and HAMAN. These are followed by a company of archers which remain without, while, HARBONAH, one of the chamberlains stands near the door so as to be within the KING'S call. NICASO runs up to the royal party and makes an obeisance before them.)

NICASO:

O queen! My Lord! A fearful thing! I saw Vashti, the slave, pour something from this phial Into the wine meant chiefly for the king. Back of a water jar she hid the thing, Which I secured. 'Tis empty, but I fear From its rank odor that it held some drug Of deadly sort. She was alone, and is Not yet aware that any saw her act. I beg thee all, by the great love I bear To taste no wine which Vashti hath prepared.

QUEEN. (*In great concern*)

My king, my Lord, what fearful thing is this! Wait but a moment. I will have this wine Drawn off, the flagons cleansed, fresh wine prepared, And Vashti placed where she can do no harm.

KING:

Not yet, my Esther, fear not. I shall know How best to act. (*To NICASO.*) Weep not, hand-maiden,

Let the red return into thy cheeks; thy Warning is not lost, but let all things Proceed as though this phial were not found.

HAMAN:

O king, I add my prayers to those thou'st heard. And beg thee take great care.

KING. (*Laughing*)

Thou'llt see some sport,
I promise, if so be, it is as we have heard.
Come! to the feast!

(*They seat themselves, the KING on the royal divan, HAMAN on the other side of ESTHER who takes the center couch. NICASO claps her hands and the slaves enter bearing dishes. VASHTI comes forward and with a look of triumph and hatred pours from the flagon she has prepared for the KING, the wine into his goblet. The other SLAVES place meats, etc., on the table. The KING holds up the goblet, VASHTI standing behind his chair.*)

This wine, poured but for me.
Is it some rare and costly vintage?

QUEEN. (*Falteringly*)
'Tis made of white grapes in Armenia,
Blended with purple in a secret way
That none but dwellers in that country
Know. I—I—I've heard it praised.

KING. (*Lifts his glass again as though preparing to drink*)
Here in this cup of gold are liquid rubies
Pressed from finest grapes; grown but for me the king
To slake his thirst; a royal wine, and fit
For royal lips.

(*He lowers the cup, and VASHTI's impatience grows.*)

Men say I am a stern, relentless king,
Slow to forgive, and quick to spring to wrath;

I forget not a wrong, yet I neglect
 No recompense to them who serve me well.
 Behind my chair stands one who once I chose
 To honour with my love. She is highborn.
 To witness to you all, that I remember
 Her birth was far above her station now,
 I will do her a signal favour.
 Before I touch this goblet with my lips
 She shall its contents drain.

(With a gesture of much condescension he offers the cup to VASHTI who has come around before him to the end of the table. She does not move to take it.)

Wouldst thou refuse? *(Sternly.)*

Dost think the honour is too great? Or dost
 Thou see perchance not wine, but blood which brims
 About the rim?

VASHTI. *(Taking the cup as though hypnotized)*
 I like not wine, O king!

KING:

Drink! I command thee! Drink the wine poured
 out

By thee, for me, the King of All the World!

VASHTI. *(Lifting her goblet and looking at the KING with hatred)*

I would that thou hadst drained it in my stead!
 'Twas cunningly prepared. Its work is swift.

(She drinks and falls back into the arms of a SLAVE who at a gesture from the KING carries her out. ESTHER hides her face in horror during this scene.)

HAMAN:

So perish all thy enemies, O king!

Within thy palace or without its walls!

KING:

Amen! Now bring fresh wine, and we'll forget
This ominous beginning to our feast.

(*The SLAVES bring in fresh flagons, carrying out the first ones, and the three eat and drink, ESTHER sparingly.*)

My queen, this banquet doth exceed my hopes;
It sees the end of our most bitter foe;
We sit here with this friend who loves us both,
The rarest fruits are here, the choicest meats.
The wines exceed in body and perfume
The finest in our kingdom. While we sit
And sip at their delights, what hast thou to
Beguile us?

ESTHER:

Wilt thou see dancing first?
Or rather hear the maidens with the lutes?
Both wait thy pleasure, Lord.

KING:

Nay, rather we would hear the honeyed words
Which falling from thy lips do tempt the bees,
To seek their hoard there, thinking them a rose.
So tell us a tale, my queen. Thou surely hast
Some happening to relate, some boon to ask
Which we but wait to hear, to say " 'Tis granted!"

ESTHER:

I fear, O king, I have no tale of mirth;
No story sweet of jinns or giants great.
But if, Ahasuerus, thou wilt hear
A sorry tale of exiles and their wrongs;
A tale of plotting 'gainst a favoured queen;
A tale of hatred and of high ambition,
Such can I tell to stir thy kingly heart.

KING:

Say on, my Esther! Star of Persia, speak!

ESTHER:

My Lord, there dwelt, in a great eastern nation,
Ruled over by the mightiest of kings
And wisest, since all chronicles began,
A people proud, exiled from their own land
And holy temple.

Sad was this remnant of a race, yet still
They kept their customs, worshipped the true God,
Keeping their course in poverty and fear.
To them their prophets, from the earliest times,
Had promised a Messiah should be born;
He should be called Immanuel, being God,
And should redeem His people and the world
From sin and death. Thus lived they on in hope.
It chanced a mighty prince, a favorite of the king,
One that he loved before all other men,
Hated these exiles, but he hated most
One godly man amongst them; even the man
Who'd given the king his life.

(HAMAN starts and becomes uneasy as she proceeds.)

This haughty prince,
Sure of his favour with the king his lord,
Did make a plot how to destroy this man
And all his race.
At last he won an edict from his lord,
That every man and woman, youth and babe,
Should die the death upon a certain day,
Even the thirteenth day of the twelfth month;
And by this writ, the queen would die the first.

(*The KING and HAMAN both start, and the KING casts a glance of anger at HAMAN, who looks bewildered and aghast.*)

For the queen was a Jew! Proud daughter
Of the man he hated most, of Mordecai!

HAMAN. (*Interrupting*)

O queen, forgive! Thy servant did not know!

KING. (*Looking darkly at HAMAN*)

An enemy and adversary he,
Who'd plot against the queen. What did the king,
My Esther, tell me that?

ESTHER:

My lord, here ends the tale.

'Tis thou alone

Must finish up the chronicle.

KING:

No! By my love, my Star shall end the tale
Even as she wills. Go on. We'll hear the end.

ESTHER. At thy high pleasure. (*She pauses a moment, then proceeds more slowly.*)

Then this gracious king, this ruler of the world
Sent word,

That Mordecai, the Jew, should come to him,
And in his presence he revoked
This murderous edict, this most cruel writ
Which he had signed. Thus did he save the life
Of his beloved, of his Star, his queen.

KING:

I like thy ending, yet 'tis not the end.

(*Turns to HARBONAH who stands in the doorway
and who comes forward as he is called.*)

Harbonah, call me Mordecai, the Jew.

(*As the KING speaks HAMAN rises partly as though
he would do the bidding, but the KING stops him
with a gesture.*)

Not thee, thou shalt be present till the end.
Thou wouldst not leave before the story's done!

HAMAN:

Mercy, O king! thy servant did not know!

KING:

So shall he learn. Ah, here comes Mordecai!

(Enter MORDECAI preceded by HARBONAH. MORDECAI bows before the KING.)

Welcome, my friend, the saviour of my life!
 But now I learn that I owe thee still more;
 Because thou art the father of my queen.

MORDECAI:

Live thou forever, king. I did indeed
 Upraise her as my daughter. Since her youth
 I've loved her as the fruit of mine own loins.
 Her father was the brother of my sire,
 And when he died, even bowed down with grief
 At our sad exile, I took her gladly
 To my heart and hearth. She is of royal blood,
 Equal thine own. The blood of Jewish kings
 Of ancient days.

KING:

Again our thanks are thine. Now for a matter
 Of serious import; this edict which
 Lord Haman hath devised, dost truly think
 It would have harmed our queen?

MORDECAI:

Twill cost her life if so it be enforced.
 It reads, O king, "that no Jew shall be spared,
 And whoso would show pity to one such,
 Whate'er their station be, his life shall pay
 The forfeit!" My king, thou knowest how strictly
 Men enforce the law of Medes and Persians.

KING:

Yes, yes, I know. It was a plot a fiend
Would gloat upon; to make me give the word
That would condemn her who is dearer to me
Than my life! And thou? What hast thou done
To foil such villainy?

MORDECAI:

Three days ago I came to warn the queen,
And since that time our race has fasted,
Putting up their prayer, unto our Lord,
The God of Israel; a mighty prayer
We made, that He would put pity and mercy
Into the king's heart, so should the queen's life
And our own be spared.

KING:

Thy God must be a mighty God indeed
For so it comes to pass. I do revoke
This edict. Harbonah, tell the scribe
To make another writing, in the which
I shall decree instead, that every Jew
With all their priests and Levites in my realm,
Which shall be mindful of their own free will
To journey to Jerusalem, there to live,
May do so.

Further, I would send a gift of silver
And of gold, or rams and beeves, as offering
To the temple of this great God, this God
Of thine, who is more powerful than fire.
Only thou, Mordecai, thou must not go,
Thou shalt remain here with thy king and queen,
Lodge in our palace, counsel with us oft,
And teach us of this God of Israel.

MORDECAI. (*Bowing before the dais*)
Gracious and very mighty art thou, Lord;
As is our God to every other god,
So art thou to all other kings of earth!
In memory and in token of thy grace,

My people, henceforth, shall, in every year,
Upon the fourteenth day of Adar,
The day next after that when they were doomed,
Make a great feast, called Purim, or the Feast
Of Lots; because their fate decided was
By lot. Our God shall give thee happiness,
And peace, and children many as the fruitful vine—
And furthermore, this chronicle of thine
Shall be accounted worthy to be read
By every people and in every tongue
So long as books shall last.

KING. (*Much pleased*)
Such words of promise and of gratitude
Are pleasing to mine ears. (*Turning to HAMAN.*)
But still remains this traitor, this vile man
Who would have killed my queen and my true
friend!

What fate is fit for him?

HAMAN. (*Falling prostrate before the KING*)
Mercy, O king!

KING:
No! Justice! (*Turns to HAROBNAH.*)
How planned Lord Haman here to end the life
Of Mordecai, the Jew?

HAROBNAH:
May't please the king to hear, he hath ordained
A gallows to be built before his house,
To stand the height of fifty cubits. Here,
When the sun shed his first rays on that day
On which the Jews were all condemned to die,
Mordecai was to hang till he was dead.

KING:
Then justly I decree, that ere the sun
Breaks through the mists which shroud to-morrow's
morn,
Thou shalt hang Haman high upon the frame

He built for Mordecai. Away with him!

(HAMAN is led away by HARBONAH and some of the guard. MORDECAI stands with his hands uplifted as though in exultation.)

MORDECAI:

"They have digged a pit before me
And fallen into the midst of it themselves.
Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of
the fowlers;
The snare is broken and we are escaped."

(*The look of a seer comes over MORDECAI'S face.*)

I see Immanuel coming as a king!
I see His kingdom spread through all the earth!
The Jews, this remnant unto whom He'll come
Are saved! The world is saved! Clear shines the
star
To light us on our way! And yet—
And yet—above it all—I see a cross—
A cross! I do not comprehend—

(ESTHER and the KING draw near to MORDECAI and
watch him with awe.)

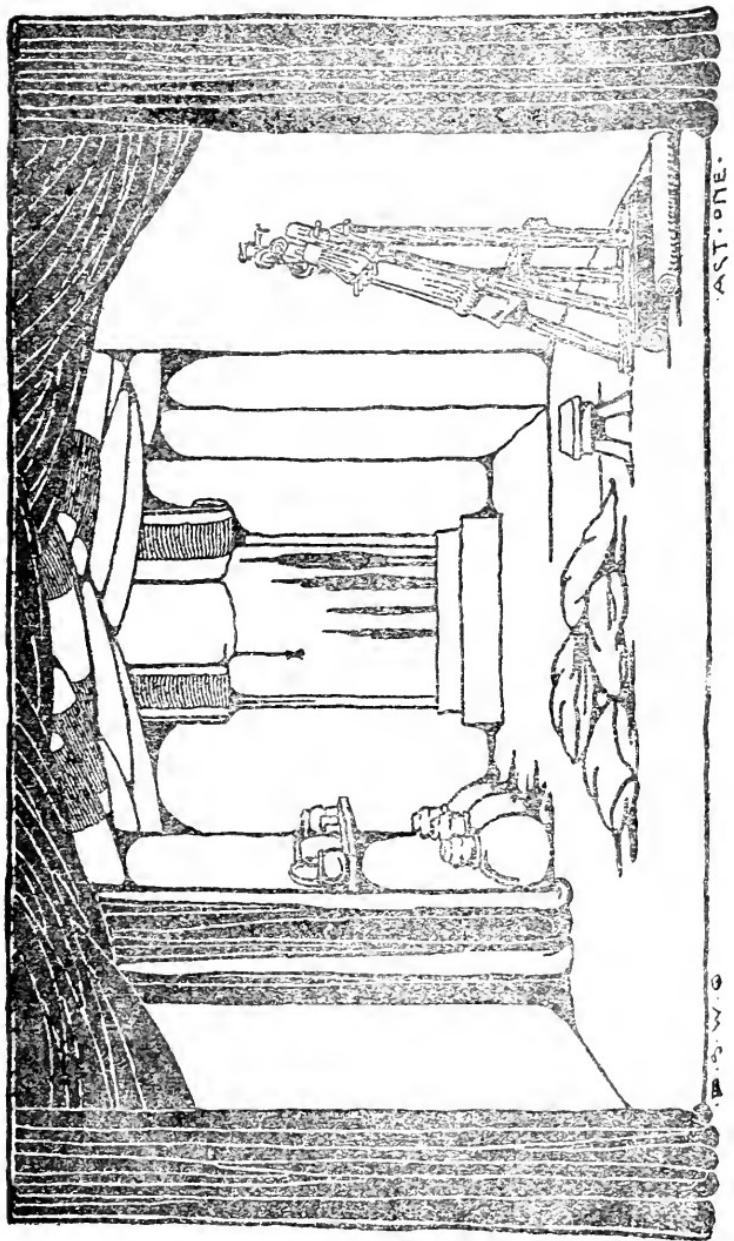
ESTHER. (*In awe-struck tones*)
A cross, my father? Look not so aghast!
Fear not. Trust in the Lord,
The God of Israel
Who hath been our help throughout all generations!

(*As the curtain slowly falls, MORDECAI still stands
pondering over the words which he repeats. "A
cross! A cross!"*)

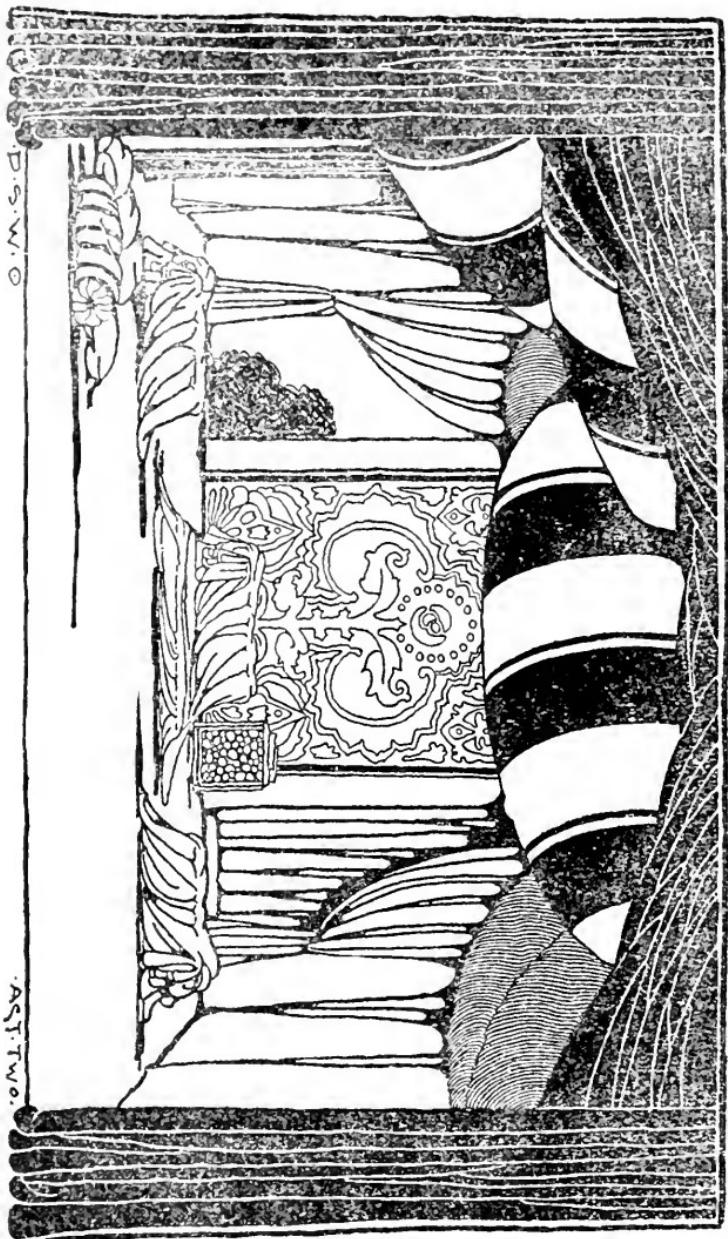
Costumes

Pictures of all costumes for the characters in this play may be found in "The Illuminated Holy Bible With Maps and Help" published by American Bible House, No. 12 West 32nd Street, New York City, or by obtaining the illustrations by Tissot for the book of Esther from The Tissot Picture Society in care of American Bible House, 12 West 32nd Street, New York City.



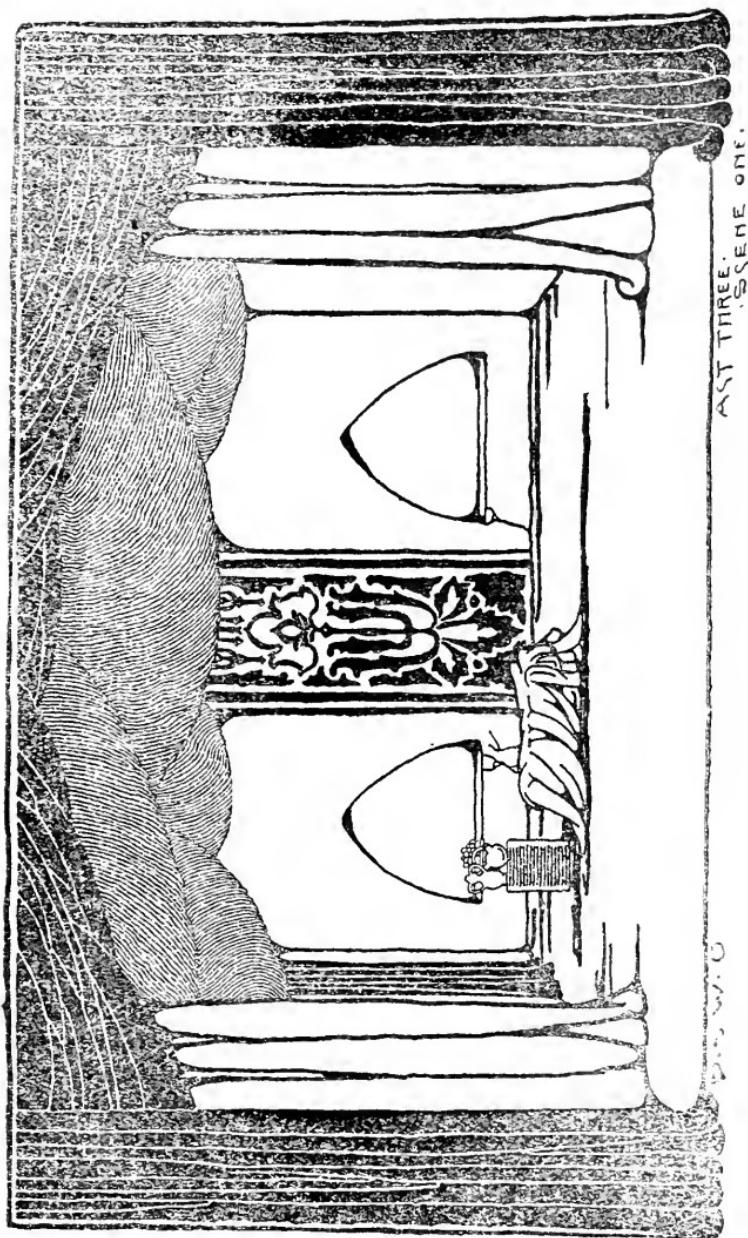


ACT ONE.



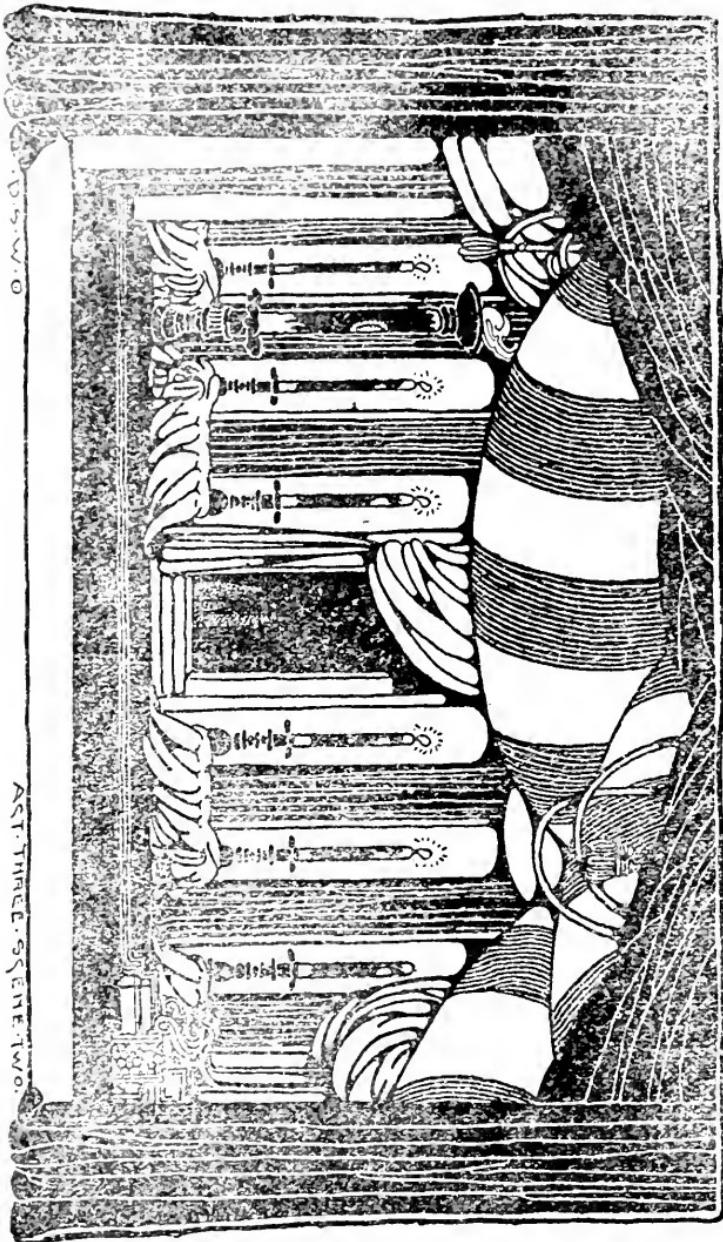
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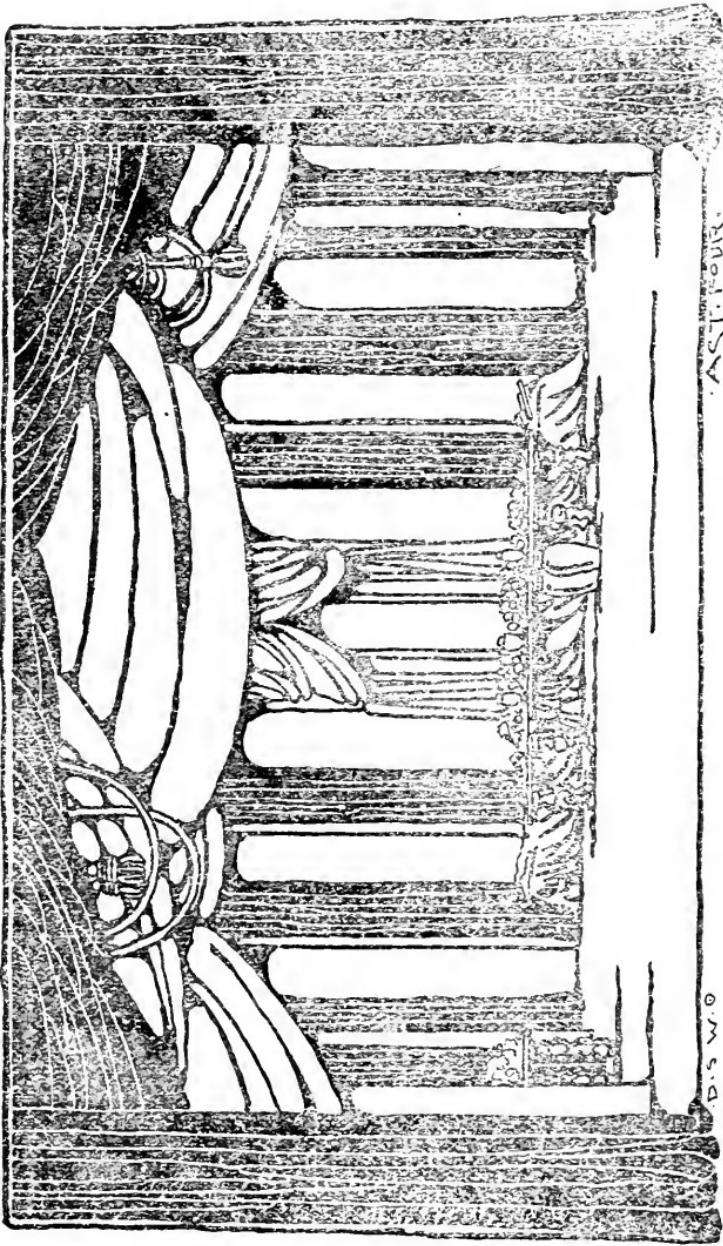


ACT THREE. SCENE ONE.

W. J. B.



ACT. THREE. SCENE TWO.



ALICE'S

WONDERLAND



WHY THE CHIMES RANG. A play in one act by Elizabeth McFadden. Adapted from the story of the same name by R. M. Alden. Especially recommended as a Christmas play because: It teaches the story of the Christ child, rather than the Byzantine legend of Santa Claus. It may be adapted to the ritual of any Christian denomination by slight changes of costume and setting. It offers a rare opportunity for exquisite church music. It may be given in the barest room, against a background of Christmas greens, or it may be presented with the most lavish equipment of a professional theatre, yet both productions will thrill the imagination and touch the heart. It teaches the beauty of a charity that gives heart and service as well as gold. Price, 35 cents.

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THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS. A Christmas play in three short acts by William Patterson Taylor. The NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS is a little play in three acts which may be produced well within an hour. The first act presents the wondrous and hurried night before Christmas preparation activities in Santa's workshop at the North Pole. The second act is a night before Christmas home bed-chamber incident, involving the desperate situation resulting from a childish difference between two brothers, which difference—"made up" true—introduces, also, the woeful possibilities of Santa's calamitous displeasure. (In this and the last act the children's classic, "The Night Before Christmas," is dramatized.) In the third act "All's well that ends well." A quartette supplies the music. This little play has grown during years of local use by the author and others. Its unbroken success in stirring and impressing the children (and the "grown-ups," too—whom, also, the author aimed to reach) was urged as a reason for its publication. Strongly recommended as an entertainment for the holiday season. Price, 30 cents.

A DREAM ON CHRISTMAS EVE. A very pleasing entertainment for little folks, by Ina Home. Time about thirty minutes, but it can be lengthened to any duration by the further introduction of each child's specialty. The costumes are according to the character represented and are easily made. The story is the dream of a little girl on Christmas eve, in which she views the good things which she is to receive on the morrow. Santa Claus enters and while filling the stocking tells a story of the little people to whom he gives his presents. Then the Christmas pudding enters and tells how she was made. Then the pumpkin pie, the holly, mistletoe, ice cream, crackers, candy, etc., enter and tell their stories. The play is easy to give and can be held in the class room, Sunday-school or a home. Price, 30 cents.

THE TOY SHOP. A new and original entertainment for children by F. S. Isham and Edward Weitzel, with some new and up-to-date music. No special number required. Particularly adapted to school or Sunday-school entertainments. One of the best entertainments for children published. Price 30 cents.

SOUTHUMBERLAND'S YULE-TIDE, a fascinating and practical community Christmas masque, by C. Arthur Coan. This delightful festival is written in the spirit of the traditional Yule celebrations of olden days, and is so conceived as to permit the whole school or community, old, young, rich or poor, to take an active part. The costumes are fully described and the instructions are in detail. Suitable for community or school use. Price, 50 cents.

MOTHER GOOSE'S CHRISTMAS VISIT. An entirely new and original entertainment for children by Edith Thompson Langley. This very pleasing entertainment embraces most of the Mother Goose characters, and any number of children, boys and girls, young and old, can take part. Songs and specialties can be introduced and the action prolonged to any length of time desired. It introduces Santa Claus and the Christmas tree and all the favorite characters of the little ones. It is an admirable entertainment for the Christmas holidays, and is printed complete with music, suggestions for staging, costuming, etc. Plays about an hour. This entertainment has always been a great success wherever produced. Price, 30 cents.

THE GIFT. A symbolic play in one act by Marie A. Foley. The action passes in a simple room of a little house near Judea during the lifetime of Our Lord. The characters are two men, one woman and three children. The costumes—tunic draperies—make it easily possible to be played by an all female cast. Joel, a little lame boy, firmly believes the Galilean can cure him of his lameness if he will go and ask Him. In preparation the boy makes a wreath of white roses as a gift for the Galilean. Huldah, with whom Joel lives, a woman with neither heart nor imagination, ridicules the boy's faith, throws the wreath into the fire and frustrates the boy's going by leaving him in sole charge of her father, an aged and infirm man. A stranger, blind, also seeking the Galilean, to regain his sight, stops at the door for food and rest. The boy takes him in. Accidentally the stranger comes in contact with the charred wreath which Joel has dragged from the fire. The stranger hears about the wreath's purpose and offers to carry it to the Galilean. Joel explains its sorry plight. "The Galilean will understand," answers the stranger. "But it is black and ugly," exclaims the boy. "But not the heart that fashioned it," he is answered. The stranger then learns of the boy's desire to be cured and offers himself to remain there with the aged man while the boy goes to get his heart's desire. The boy accepts the stranger's great sacrifice (much to the disappointment of the old invalid) and leaves the house. However, in a few minutes the boy is back again crying out that he cannot go. "It is much worse being blind than being lame." The stranger is put upon the road by the boy to seek the Galilean. The boy watching him through the window sees the stranger meet with a Traveller, sees the giving of his burnt wreath to the Traveller, its transformation into beautiful crimson roses as it touches the Traveller's hands, then the return of the stranger no longer blind to the house. In his joy the boy leaps across the room to the door to find that his crutches have dropped to the floor and he has leaped across the room unaided—cured. The play ends with much joy for all three in the room while outside is heard the voice of the unbeliever, "Strange we missed Him; He must have passed this way." The stranger answers, "Yes, He passed this way." Price, 35 cents.



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